

Complying with The Code: Optimising student learning in animal-based practicals

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Background

There is a debate in biology teaching programs over the use of animals in learning activities, and how it can be best justified from an ethical perspective.

We seek to improve student practical class learning experiences by improving our delivery of animal-based practical classes.

Project plan + outcomes (see handout)

It is time for UTAS and other Schools of Biology and Zoology across the Australian university sector to re-evaluate the use of animals in university teaching.

We will develop a resource which will facilitate peer and self assessment of the relevant aspects of animal use in biology teaching to:

- evaluate student perceptions** about how and why we use animals in learning exercises (survey 1st, 2nd, 3rd, Honours level)
- create a CD resource “kit”** to assist teachers to meet the specific requirements of The Code when designing and implementing animal-based T&L activities
- seek peer review** from colleagues also using animals in T&L and use their comments to refine the kit
- evaluate the kit** by asking colleagues external to our School to assess at least one of their current animal-based practicals against it

Preliminary results

Only 12.5 % of students come into 1st yr having not worked with animals or animal tissues before.

However, 19.6 % have given no conscious thought to animal ethics issues relating to the use of animals in T&L.

Only 8.3 % believe the use of animals in T&L is always acceptable, regardless of circumstances: most state that animal use in T&L should be carefully considered.

Many cite the opportunity to bridge gaps in understanding between theory and reality as a benefit of the use of animals in university T&L.

Initial conclusions

It is important that our use of animals accommodates the opinions of our students (as a reflection of the current views of the broader community), without compromising T&L quality. Our “kit” will aim to give teachers the tools they need to do this.

